

# How Talking Mats can help OT's to make personalised care a reality

The Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT) have just published “**Making personalised care a reality: The role of occupational therapy.**”

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*“There is no doubt that people themselves are experts in what is important to them, their experience of illness and their familial and social circumstances”*

RCOT 2019

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## The importance of a shared approach to decision making

The document recognises that people living with long-term conditions bring different and equally important, knowledge and expertise to the decision-making process. The challenge for Occupational Therapists (OT's) is how to ensure that they really hear the views of the people they work with.

Talking Mats is a visual tool created to enable **better conversations.**

It helps people to **understand** what is being discussed, to **reflect** and **organise** their thoughts, to **say** what matters most to them and record **their views.**

It helps OT's to really **listen**, to **learn** new information, to **involve** the person in their own **planning** and support **decision making.**

A truly personalised approach.

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*“Services must move away from an approach that focuses on needs and problems to one that works with people to establish the strengths and assets that they bring to achieve positive change in their lives”*

RCOT 2019

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## Focus on people's strengths, balancing choice and risk

As experts in supporting people's participation in occupations (daily activities) OT's empower people to maximise their independence and quality of life. OT's support people to think about the benefits and risks of activity to help embed their choices and achieve their goals.

Talking Mats supports **thinking** and helps **communicate** what is important to the person. They can be used to **explore** what is going well, and identify what is a struggle. A Talking Mat can help to **simplify** abstract ideas and communicate an **understanding** of complex issues.

## Live the life they want

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*“Everyone whether they are young or old takes risks on a daily basis when going about their everyday lives.”*

RCOT 2019

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John has Parkinson’s. He has lived with his mother all his life but she has just passed away. He loves their home, especially spending time looking out of the large window in the lounge into the surrounding countryside.

John has recently had a couple of falls and now that he lives alone his sister is worried about him. She thinks it might be better if he moved into a care home. John struggles to communicate what he wants as his speech is slow and he often loses track of what he is saying. His OT is concerned that he does not understand the risks of continuing to live at home.

The OT used a Talking Mat to enable John to communicate what he felt about his domestic life. He used the visual scale to identify that he was having difficulty carrying his meal into the lounge where he liked to eat, whilst looking out of the window. He explained that he had fallen when trying to wipe up a spillage from the floor. He felt confident making himself snacks and drinks and could look after the cat.

This information gained through a focused approach, helped the OT understand that John had a good understanding of his abilities and difficulties. Together they were able to problem solve ways to promote his safety and independence. John used the Talking Mat to express clearly that despite the risk of falling he wasn’t ready to give up his home or his cat just yet.

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*“Occupational Therapists have expertise in balancing risk and addressing barriers, while respecting the choices that people make about the way they wish to live their life.”*

RCOT 2019

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## Maintain people's occupations (daily activities)

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*“As life expectancy increases, the need to maintain and promote productive healthy lives is one of the nation's biggest priorities”*

*Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland 2016*

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Sue has found life difficult recently, she has suffered several losses which have resulted in her feeling depressed and experiencing anxiety when she tries to leave her home.

She now finds it difficult to face the day ahead and is not always getting dressed or eating well. She spends most of the day in bed and feels that her memory is deteriorating. She is scared of what the future may hold and feels she has no purpose. When asked by her OT what she used to enjoy doing, she says that she cannot remember.

The OT used a Talking Mat to enable Sue to think about what leisure activities were important to her. Sue used the visual scale to rate how important a range of activities had been in her life. She explained that although she loved to knit she had got out of the habit as she didn't have anyone to knit for anymore. She used to enjoy reading but now struggles to concentrate. She was very clear that she did not like to sing and was never going to join a choir!

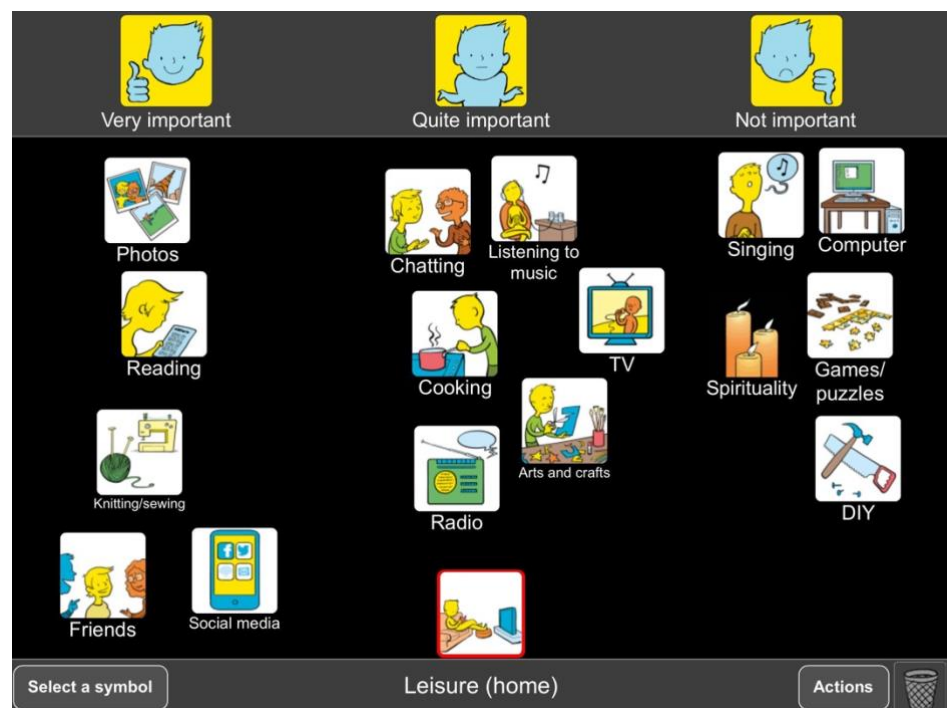
By listening to Sue whilst she completed her Talking Mat, the OT learnt a lot about her in a short space of time. Together they came up with a plan to help Sue take up knitting again. She soon, with the OT's support, started knitting hats for a special care baby unit and even joined her local “knit and natter” group having found them via social media. Her next goal is to volunteer at her local primary school where she hopes to share her love of reading with the children there.

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*“To ensure that people are able to access and make the most of opportunities for social participation, advice and guidance are often needed. With the profession's focus on enabling participation, occupational therapists are ideally placed to address this.”*

*RCOT 2019*

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To find out more about the Talking Mats please look at

[www.talkingmats.com](http://www.talkingmats.com). Link available to try out a digital taster mat (leisure at home) for free.